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Seventeenth Judicial Circuit

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Laura K. Moneyham
Assistant Secretary, Residential Services
Department of Juvenile Justice
2737 Centerview Drive, Suite 2219
Tallahassee, FL 32399-3100

Re: Abuse Report
Palm Beach Juvenile
Correctional Facility

Dear Ms. Moneyham:

It has come to my attention that youth who are committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice who are presently residing at the Palm Beach Juvenile Correctional Facility are forced to endure significant abuse while fulfilling their court ordered disposition. The abuse is attributed to the lack of food, quality of food, gambling, lack of supervision, and violence towards youth from staffers and other committed youth. This is outrageous, alarming and sounds too much like similar allegations that have been made and litigated at Thompson Academy, yet another facility run by the same private company.

I have grave concerns about the supervision, safety and health of the children the state has chosen to place at this residential program.

It is alleged that staffers condone a form of gambling known as "picks" wherein the loser of a wager must permit the winner to "pick" a food item from his meal. If the loser of the wager does not honor the arrangement, the youth is subjected to physical attacks known as "sliding". It is alleged that staff turns-a-blind-eye to the systemic gambling and intimidation within the facility. Some youth are barely eating as a result of the intimidation associated with the gambling and food trading. One youth has not moved his bowls for a significant period of time due to the associated stress, anxiety and intimidation resulting from food gambling.

It is further alleged that the quality of food provided is poor. Maggots are alleged to have been found in a meal that was served recently. Staff was alerted to the presence of maggots, yet it is alleged that no action was taken other than to discarding the affected meal.

It is alleged that a "riot" occurred in the cafeteria recently wherein youth fought unchecked for a significant period of time. Staffer Brown is alleged to have praised youth with handshakes after the fight.

It is further alleged that Staffer Gilmore has threatened to "have people fuck up" a committed youth, and further threatened that she would get another youth to 'sneak,' which is a euphemism for assault, committed youth she disliked. It is also alleged that Staffer Peterkin used the "N - word" in referencing a committed youth. She also allegedly called him a "fuck N - - - r."

It is alleged that a staffer that was transferred from Thompson Academy had physically abused youth in this facility. The staffer allegedly punched a youth in the face and the youth sustained a bloody nose. It is further alleged that several staffers were aware of the abuse but failed to report it. Another youth claims that he was jumped on a different occasion and sustained a bruised nose. He was treated by the nurse and given an ice pack for the swelling.

In light of the serious issues raised against Youth Services International, Inc. at another program, I am not assured or comfortable in assuming these are isolated incidents. This facility needs to be immediately reviewed to avoid yet more abuse of my clients at the hands of private corporations outsourced by the Department of Juvenile Justice. I would strongly encourage you to look closely at facilities run by this corporation since a disturbing trend seems to be surfacing.

Thank you kindly for your immediate attention to this matter. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at 954-831-8636.

Sincerely,



Gordon H. Weekes, Jr.